

Spokesman who announced Kennedy's death reflects 25 years later

BEATTYVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Malcolm Kilduff clearly remembers the horror and tears on reporters' faces when he told them that President Kennedy was dead.

The assistant White House press secretary was on his first trip as Kennedy's acting spokesman 25 years ago Tuesday when he was forced to make the statement confirming the nation's worst fears.

"President John F. Kennedy died at approximately 1 p.m. Central Standard Time today here in Dallas," the nervous young spokesman said as news-service reporters dashed for telephones.

"He died of a gunshot wound in the brain."

Now 60, Kilduff recalled the events of that day from his office here where he is editor of the weekly Beattyville Enterprise.

"I was half crying, with tears in my eyes, because I found it difficult to say," Kilduff said.

But the reporters who assembled for that briefing at 1:31 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963, were not the first to get confirmation of the tragedy from Kilduff.

A short time earlier, Kilduff said, he was seeking permission to make the announcement and walked into the heavily guarded room at Parkland Memorial Hospital where Lyndon B. and Lady Bird Johnson were. Kilduff said he wasn't sure how to address the man who was sitting before him.

"I just gave my best shot, and I called him 'Mr. President,'" Kilduff recalled recently. "And Lady Bird kind of screamed. ... She realized what I was saying."